these primitive forms need not be insisted on as the only means to give modern sculpture an equally expressive character. An artist, without losing sight of the principle, may still introduce a sufficient variety of action, to save himself from the suspicion of poverty of ideas, and his works from the charge of a dull, monotonous uniformity. Statues of all classes—of the king, the judge, the philosopher, the soldier, or the senator—of simple design, and in attitudes of meditation, offer ample opportunity for the display of all the higher attributes of art, whether of expression or form: and when to these are added appropriate illustrations in relievo or in figures, it is going too far to say that church sculpture, so to call it, does not give the artist room to exercise his imagination, and to shew his skill. It might be interesting to trace the origin and growth of the mixed or pseudo-classical taste, and to attempt to account for the abandonment of the devotional or religious feeling which characterizes all the earlier specimens of monumental design; but the inquiry does not necessarily bear upon the purpose I have particularly in view, and its consideration would carry me far beyond the limits to which I desire to confine myself in this letter. A distinguished French writer has made the following remarkable observation:—"Quand la foi est morte au cœur d'une nation vieille, ses cimetières ont l'aspect d'une décoration païenne." Surely, whatever may be the cause of such an effect, this may too truly be said with regard to the "aspect" of those of our churches in which monuments are found. Instead of inviting meditation, or giving rise to serious thoughts, they are in this respect little better than places of amusement—and, too often, exhibition rooms of bad taste and no feeling; and so far justify the doubt felt by a certain right reverend prelate, who as he looked round at the anomalous half pagan and mythological representations which crowd Westminster Abbey, inquired "whether he was in a Christian church or a heathen temple?"

This false taste is not confined to this country, and it is most unjust to charge it, as some are too much inclined to do, to the change of feeling produced by the Reformation. It is needless to particularize the numerous examples of it that may be found all over the Continent, in the churches of Germany, France, and Italy. In St. Peter's, at Rome, the monuments even of the Popes exhibit the most absurd and incongruous compositions. Their figures are frequently seen seated, standing, or kneeling, in the midst of mythological and allegorical personifications (under the forms of male and female attendants, either half naked or not clothed at all), which, instead of adding to the proper interest of the work, entirely rob the design of anything like a religious character. This style of design was at one time universal; it is, as I have stated, met with abroad, and it dates there from the same period as the objectionable taste which has helped to disfigure; and it may almost be said to desecrate, the churches of England with the same kind of monumental compositions—and it is more striking on the Continent, from the greater scale on which sculpture has there been practised.

It has been said that those who are intrusted with the care of our churches have endeavoured to prevent the introduction of objectionable designs; and one of the arguments that have been used in favour of charging fees for the admission of monuments into churches is, that it acts as a check to the erection of works of a character that are inappropriate to such buildings. That the imposition of high fees may occasionally prevent the erection of monuments at all, admits of no doubt, but that the fees, however exorbitant, have the slightest influence upon the style, or taste of the design of a work, or, to go further, that they are ever charged with the view to exclude a work simply on account of its demerits or inappropriateness to a place of worship, is, we all know, contrary to the fact. The fees charged for erecting a monument, however humble its pretensions, in Westminster Abbey, are proverbially heavy. What effect has this produced? None; but to prevent those whose means are unequal to meet the demand from erecting monuments in the church*—certainly none whatever either in giving a higher or better character to design; or in preventing the introduction of the most absurd, and, occasionally, the most objectionable fancies and follies that ever were "done into stone." I am told no fee is charged for the erection of monuments in St. Paul's Cathedral: but, with the view of preventing the erection of tablets and other works of small dimensions and trifling character, which might disfigure the church, a general rule exists that no monument or statue shall be admitted there, the expense of which does not amount to such a sum as shall secure the work being of a certain importance as respects size and character. This is well in its way, and as far as it goes: but there is no regulation to insure the design being of a Christian character, as may be seen by any one who walks round that church. The monuments, creditable as they are to their respective authors for other qualities, are fully as often illustrations of the fables and mythology set forth in 'Natalis Comes,' or in Dr. Lempriere's 'Dictionary,' as they are intelligible and suggestive records of deceased Christian men.

In the above remarks I have referred, generally, to the distinction that properly exists between two classes of design; and I have stated the more striking objections that have occurred to others as well as to myself, to the admission into churches of monuments eminently deficient in the treatment appropriate to such destination. It now remains to be considered whether there are any means by which this evil may be removed, or if not removed, at least partially remedied. If these can be discovered, another important advantage will be gained, in addition to that alluded to, in the prevention of such questions as unfortunately have arisen with respect to admitting into churches ordinary commemorative statues of individuals whose lives or writings have been considered of a character to justify their exclusion. The guardians of our churches would then be spared that most painful and apparently uncharitable office, of pronouncing sentence upon a fellow-creature no longer amenable to human judgment: and a statue intended to do honour to the poetical genius of a Byron would not then be left for years in the cellars of the Custom House, because the authorities of the Church cannot consent to admit it within the walls of a place of worship.

The most obvious mode of effecting these objects would be to establish distinct receptacles for monuments so distinct in character as those last referred to, and what may be termed sepulchral monuments: to appropriate some public building, or apartments in such building, exclusively for heroic commemoration, and to let it be generally understood that no works but such as have a distinctive ecclesiastical character in their mode of treatment, are to be placed in edifices used for religious purposes. It is clear that any general rule established on this principle can only be made to apply to the future; but it may not be altogether beyond our means to effect some beneficial changes in the disposition of existing works, and it is to this subject that I would now earnestly invite your attention. Taking the projected changes as the ground-work for a more extended operation, I should propose to carry the partially new arrangement of the monuments much further than at present may be intended, and suggest that an entirely new *locale* may be used for those statues which are either placed where they cannot be seen, or inconveniently or improperly occupy situations in the body of the Abbey, or in its chapels. The fact of these works having already been received into the sacred edifice might seem to form an objection to their being removed; and it may be urged that, whatever regulations may be made with regard to admitting works in future, respect should be shewn to these "older tenants of the soil." Some objection to change may also be felt by those who connect historical associations with the monuments placed as they now are in the Abbey. It is far from my wish to disturb a charm that gives so great an interest and value to commemorative art. On the contrary, it is to increase the value of the associations to which monumental sculpture should give rise, that I urge the adoption, as far as may be, of my plan. I feel as strongly as any one, that the great object which art is intended to effect is only to be advanced by elevating it above the mechanical: that it is the power to excite thought that gives the productions of genius their hold upon the feelings, and raises the real artist to the rank of the poet and the moral teacher. It is, then, with the hope of giving the fullest effect to fine creations of art (too often destroyed from the works being placed in inappropriate situations), and, at the same time, of advancing another great purpose, by removing from a place of worship objects that are calculated rather to disturb than induce reflection, that I make the above suggestion. I would observe, too, that the question is not one of destruction nor rejection, but simply of change of situation. It must be remembered that very few of the monuments in the Abbey are immediately over, or, indeed, very near the remains of those in whose memory they have been erected: nay, it is perfectly well known that the subjects of many of them—as Shakespeare for instance—are not even interred in the church. Making, then, every allowance for these objections, and admitting that they rest on grounds deserving respect and consideration, I still venture to think they are not insuperable. The change of situation within the Abbey is, as I have observed, already contemplated. An occasion fortunately presents itself, if it can be taken advantage of, for carrying out a very important part of the plan I venture to recommend, while at the same time the utmost regard may be paid to the works which it may be thought expedient to select for removal. Admitting that the entire rejection of any monument already received into the Abbey might give offence, a simple change of situation to a building connected with and contiguous to, the church, could not be considered to involve any disrespect to the works placed there. The opportunity of effecting this is now offered to the Dean and Chapter, if they should be pleased to avail themselves of it, by the removal of the public records from the Chapter House, in which hitherto they have been deposited, to a building exclusively intended for the reception of such documents. I would most respectfully, though earnestly, recommend, if the necessary permission can be obtained, that this portion of the Abbey should be used for commencing the reform every well-wisher to monumental or ecclesiastical art must be anxious to see made. The statues—for at present I only contemplate the removal of a limited number of these—might, under proper superintendence, be advantageously placed round this fine chamber; and thus, while the church would gain in beauty and character by having many of those works removed from it, a kind of Walhalla, or Hall of Heroes, would be commenced, having for its first tenants and decoration memorials consecrated, as it were, by having originally stood in the church itself. The works in relievo, and other more extensive compositions, which are fixed against the walls of the church are, for the most part, quite as objectionable in style and taste as some of the single statues, and equally disfigure the building; but their removal would involve so much difficulty, both as regards cost and finding other places for them, that I will not venture to offer any opinion upon the best way of re-arranging such works, lest, in my recommendation to do more than appears practicable, I fail in gaining your support towards what I feel really is so. If those in whose power it is to sanction the alteration will but earnestly give their assistance in carrying it into effect.

The adoption of some such principles as I have here endeavoured to advocate, would tend more than any thing else to improve the character of monumental design of all kinds. Much has already been done by some of the more distinguished of our sculptors, by the adoption of a more simple mode of treatment, and by giving a more concentrated interest to their subject, to discountenance the miserable and objectionable mixture of times and character that have pervaded works of art; and it is gratifying to witness the manner in which this attempt to give a better direction to taste has been received, as well as the effect it has already had on the public mind. There is now no fear that we shall again see the heathen mythology ransacked to illustrate the character of a contemporary hero or divine. Mars and Hercules will no longer be the aides-de-camp of the victorious general; nor a naked Neptune, flourishing his trident, the attendant of a full-dressed admiral of the British fleet; nor will the presence of Apollo, or the supervision of the goddess Minerva, be considered essential to direct the pen, incite the genius, or advance the studies, of the poet, the orator, or the theologian; but were it understood that no sepulchral monuments would be admitted into churches that have not upon them the impress of serious thought, artists would by degrees have their minds attuned to the proper mode of composing and treating such subjects; while their poetical fancy would find abundant exercise in statues and relievi of the commemorative class, to be placed in the open air, or in halls and porticoes, where feelings of triumph and aspirations after worldly honour and the praise of men may not improperly be indulged in. A more florid style of design may also have its advantages where a striking or picturesque effect is to be produced, or where great variety in the composition may be in harmony with surrounding objects.

I offer the foregoing suggestions with great deference and respect; but I trust I shall not be considered presuming for thus expressing my opinions upon a subject to which, from the nature of my pursuits, I have given much of my attention; and to which I attach a greater degree of importance than many are disposed to attribute to it. The records of the dead, in whatever form they come before us, are among the most interesting and affecting of the works of man, and, in many respects, among the most valuable monuments which one age can leave to another. In all regions, savage or civilized, and from the most remote periods, have such memorials existed; and whether they are the offerings of private affection or the tribute of public gratitude, they make their strong appeal to our sympathies, and are associated with many of the best feelings of our nature. In this point of view, then, they claim our highest regard; and I am most anxious to see such works justly appreciated and properly disposed of. I have presumed to think it is in the power of those who have the management of our cathedrals and churches, to avail themselves advantageously of the feeling that is now developing itself on all matters relating to art; and especially, to effect great improvements in those particulars to which I have alluded. The dean and chapter of

* Mr. Westmacott observes, in a note—"It is due to the Dean and Chapter to state that the fees go to the restoration and repairs of the fabric; and that no charge is made for permission to erect a public monument."

For info on OCR and PDF Compression go to our website